VERTIGO

CINDERELLA

FABLES ARE FOREVER

4

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suggested for
mature readers
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CHRIS ROBERSON

SHAWN MCMANUS

Rome, 1985.
YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I HATE ABOUT "SIMPLE ASSIGNMENTS"?
THEY'RE HARDLY *EVER* SIMPLE.
I'M STARTING TO THINK THAT MAYBE YOU DON'T *TRUST* US.
I KNOW THINGS HAVEN'T WORKED OUT HERE EXACTLY LIKE YOU EXPECTED.
BUT THAT'S NO REASON TO BE *UGLY* ABOUT IT.
BUT IF YOU DON'T START ANSWERING MY *QUESTIONS,* THINGS ARE GOING TO GET UGLY *REAL* QUICK.

CINDERELLA
FABLES ARE FOREVER
– PART FOUR –

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I WAS IN ROME TO EXTRACT ANANSI, AN AFRICAN FABLE WHO WAS A MEMBER OF THE SHADOW FABLETOWN.
ANANSI SAT AT THE CENTER OF A WHOLE WEB OF SECRETS AND LIES, SO THE FACT THAT HE WANTED TO DEFECT TO OUR SIDE MADE HIM TOO ATTRACTIVE AN OFFER TO PASS UP.
IF YOU ASK ME, I THINK YOU GOT A HEAD START ON UGLY, DOROTHY.
A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT. WHICH OF COURSE WENT PEAR-SHAPED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.
SO WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, DOROTHY?
HOW DOES A HOMESPUN INNOCENT FARMGIRL END UP A KILLER FOR HIRE, WITH BLOOD ALL OVER HER HANDS?
ARE YOU JUDGING ME, CINDY?
OR IS THE HIGH AND MIGHTY PRINCESS JUST PEEVED THAT THE SHOE IS ON THE OTHER FOOT?

"I MAY HAVE BEEN INNOCENT ONCE, BUT THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.
"MY INNOCENCE DIED WHEN MY HOUSE FELL ON A WITCH.
"BUT FIRST THING I KNEW, ALL THESE LITTLE FOLKS STARTED CHEERING, AND GAVE ME A REWARD--A PAIR OF MAGIC SHOES.
"AND I LOVED THOSE SILVER SLIPPERS.
"DAMN NEAR BROKE MY HEART WHEN I LOST THEM OVER THE DEADLY DESERT.
"ANYHOW, ONCE THE WIZARD HEARD THAT I'D TAKEN CARE OF ONE WITCH...
"...HE HIRED ME TO TAKE OUT THE OTHER.
"I TOOK THE JOB, AND YOU KNOW WHAT? I LIKED IT."
MY AUNTIE EM ALWAYS SAID YOU SHOULD FIND SOMETHING YOU LOVE TO DO AND THEN DO IT, SO I FIGURED...
HEY, WHAT'S SO FUNNY?
YOU MIGHT BE GOOD AT KILLING WITCHES, BUT YOU KNOW WHAT?

YOU SUCK AT TYING KNOTS.
DAMMIT TO HELL...!
BIGBY'S SIXTH RULE OF ENGAGEMENT: GO AFTER THE MOST DANGEROUS OPPONENT FIRST, AND TAKE OUT ANY OTHERS QUICK.
HEY, NOW!
BANG!
YOU COW. HERE WE WERE, HAVING A PLEASANT CONVERSATION.
KRACK
SLAM
WHAT CAN I SAY, DOT? YOU WERE BEGINNING TO BORE ME.

MISS GALE, GET CLEAR! I CAN'T SHOOT IF...
JUST TAKE THE DAMN SHOT ALREADY, ANANSI! IF YOU HIT ME, I CAN TAKE IT.
THING IS, SHE WAS PROBABLY RIGHT. CONSIDERING HOW WELL KNOWN HER STORY HAD BECOME, SHE WAS PROBABLY AS TOUGH AS ME. IT WAS TIME FOR A CHANGE OF PLANS.
BANG!
YES! SHOOT HER ALREADY!
BANG!
CRAAASH!
I HIT HER!
YEAH, WELL, THAT AND A NICKEL WILL BUY YOU JACK SQUAT. A FABLE WITH HER KIND OF STREET CRED ISN'T GOING DOWN FOR A DAMNED BULLET.
I HAD HOPED TO LEAVE ROME WITH ANANSI, AND MAYBE SOME INTEL ON THE SHADOW FABLETOWN.
AS IT WAS, I WAS LUCKY TO LEAVE AT ALL.

OF COURSE, BACK THEN I'D WALKED INTO A TRAP WITHOUT *REALIZING* IT. THIS TIME, I'M DOING IT ON *PURPOSE*.
Burkina Faso, Now.
I AM *SO* SORRY THAT YOU WON'T BE STAYING WITH US LONGER.
ONLY *THIS* TIME, MISS CINDERELLA, YOU WILL NOT BE LEAVING THROUGH THE *WINDOW*.
IT WOULD *SO* DISAPPOINT MISS GALE IF YOU DID.
LET CINDERELLA *GO*, ANANSI. IT'S *ME* YOU REALLY WANT.
NICE TRY WITH THE WHOLE SELFLESS THING, IVAN, BUT YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME. I THINK WE'RE A *PACKAGE* DEAL.
BESIDES, I DON'T *WANT* TO GO, THROUGH THE *WINDOW* OR OTHERWISE. I'M *RIGHT* WHERE I WANT TO BE.

THIS WAY, PLEASE.
A TRUCK IS WAITING DOWNSTAIRS TO TAKE YOU TO MISS GALE'S... ASSOCIATES.
WHEN WE GET OUTSIDE, MAKE A BREAK FOR IT. I'LL STAY AND TRY TO HOLD THEM OFF.
THANKS BUT NO THANKS. WHERE YOU GO, I GO.
ANANSI'S NOT EVEN TRYING TO HIDE ALL THIS HARDWARE. AND WHY SHOULD HE? HE OWNS THE BUILDING.
HECK, HE PROBABLY OWNS THE WHOLE STREET.
IT WAS SO NICE SEEING YOU BOTH AGAIN. I'D SAY THAT WE SHOULD DO IT AGAIN SOON, BUT...WELL.
SAFE TRAVELS!
SLAM!
I'VE GOT TO HAND IT TO HIM: EVEN WHEN HE'S SELLING SOMEONE DOWN THE RIVER, ANANSI IS ONE CHARMING BASTARD.

I WASN'T SURE WHERE WE'D FIND DOROTHY'S "ASSOCIATES," BUT IF WE'RE HEADING TO THE AIRPORT, I DON'T SUPPOSE IT MATTERS.
RPORT
WE WON'T BE STICKING AROUND HERE LONG.
NEVER SEEN **THIS** GUY BEFORE. DOESN'T **SAY** MUCH, DOES HE?
WHERE ARE YOU ***TAKING*** US? I ***DEMAND*** TO KNOW!
CALM DOWN, IVAN. SOMEHOW, I DON'T THINK HE'S THE CHATTY TYPE.

LOOKS LIKE WE'RE FLYING NORTHWEST. NOT MUCH OUT THIS WAY BUT LOTS OF WATER, AND THE U.S. ON THE OTHER SIDE.
CINDY! THERE ARE ONLY TWO GUARDS, THE MAN AND THE WOMAN. IF WE COULD BREAK FREE...
IF IT IS DOROTHY BEHIND THIS, SHE'S LEARNED HER LESSON. NO MORE SHODDY KNOTS **THIS** TIME AROUND.
NO, IVAN. WE SIT TIGHT. WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR DOROTHY GALE, RIGHT?
WELL, THESE PEOPLE ARE TAKING US RIGHT *TO* HER.

AFTER THE ROME FIASCO, BIGBY AND I AGREED THAT IT WAS **HIGH** TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT DOROTHY.
Switzerland, 1986.
BUT WE DIDN'T SEE MUCH POINT IN TRYING TO HUNT HER DOWN. BETTER TO LET HER COME TO **US**.
YOU **CAN'T** BE SERIOUS!
SNOW, I DON'T THINK HE'S **SMART** ENOUGH TO BE **JOKING**.
BUT FOR **THAT**, WE'D NEED A LITTLE **HELP**.

BIGBY HAD CONVINCED SNOW WHITE THAT SHE NEEDED A BREAK FROM HER DUTIES AS DEPUTY MAYOR, SINCE SHE HADN'T HAD A VACATION IN **DECADES.**
WHEN HE GOT KING COLE TO **PAY** FOR THE TRIP OUT OF FABLETOWN FUNDS...
...HOW COULD SNOW REFUSE?
RUM GIMLET FOR ME.
I'LL HAVE A WHITE WINE SPRITZER.
YOU KNOW, CINDY, I ***STILL*** CAN'T FIGURE OUT HOW YOU JUST ***HAPPENED*** TO BE STAYING IN THE SAME CHALET AS ME.
OH, IT WASN'T AN ***ACCIDENT,*** SNOW. WHEN I HEARD ABOUT YOUR VACATION I GOT ***SO*** JEALOUS I COULDN'T STAND IT. SO HERE I AM.
BESIDES, IT'S NOT LIKE CRISPIN CAN'T RUN THE SHOE STORE WHILE I'M AWAY. AND ***GAH,*** THAT PLACE CAN BE ***SO*** BORING.
MMM. WELL, I'LL SAY ***THIS*** FOR YOU, CINDY, YOU'RE ***NOTHING*** IF NOT ***CONSISTENT.***
LIKE ALMOST EVERYONE ELSE IN FABLETOWN, SNOW HAD NO IDEA I WAS ANYTHING OTHER THAN WHAT I SEEMED--A BUBBLEHEADED GADABOUT.

WHICH WAS GOING TO MAKE WHAT CAME NEXT A LITTLE **TRICKY.**
WE KNEW THAT DOROTHY WAS KEEPING TABS ON FABLETOWN, AND THE DEPUTY MAYOR OUT THERE IN THE OPEN WITH A HEAD FULL OF SECRETS WOULD BE TOO TEMPTING TO RESIST.
BIGBY HADN'T BEEN CRAZY ABOUT THE IDEA OF USING SNOW AS **BAIT.**
BUT I CONVINCED HIM THERE WASN'T ANYONE IN THE FABLETOWN BUSINESS OFFICE BETTER SUITED FOR THE JOB. WHO WAS I **GOING** TO USE INSTEAD? **FLY?**
BUT SO FAR, IT WAS BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE DOROTHY WASN'T BITING.
DISCOTHEQUE
CINDY, I DON'T **WANT** TO GO DANCING, I'M **TIRED.**
COME ON, SNOW, IT'LL BE **FUN!**
I KEPT US OUT IN THE PUBLIC EYE AS MUCH AS I COULD, IN CROWDED PLACES WITH **LOADS** OF OPPORTUNITY FOR A SNATCH-AND-GRAB.
BUT SO FAR? **NOTHING.**

DOROTHY WAS BEGINNING TO **DISAPPOINT** ME.
ARE YOU OKAY? LOOKS LIKE YOU KEEP WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO SHOW UP.
MEN
NO, SORRY, I'M PROBABLY JUST A LITTLE **HUNG OVER,** STILL. YOU WERE SAYING?
WELL, IT'S JUST THAT BIGBY CAN **NEVER** ADMIT HE'S **WRONG.**
JUST THE OTHER DAY, I SAID TO HIM...
STILL, IF THE TRAP **WOULDN'T** SPRING, I **HAD** GOTTEN AN ALL-EXPENSES-PAID SKIING TRIP OUT OF THE DEAL.
THE ONLY **DOWNSIDE** WAS HAVING TO LISTEN TO SNOW COMPLAIN ABOUT MY **BOSS** CONSTANTLY.
I WISHED THOSE TWO WOULD JUST GET A **ROOM** ALREADY. THAT WHOLE "CHEERS/SAM & DIANE" WILL-THEY-OR-WON'T-THEY THING WAS JUST **TIRESOME.**

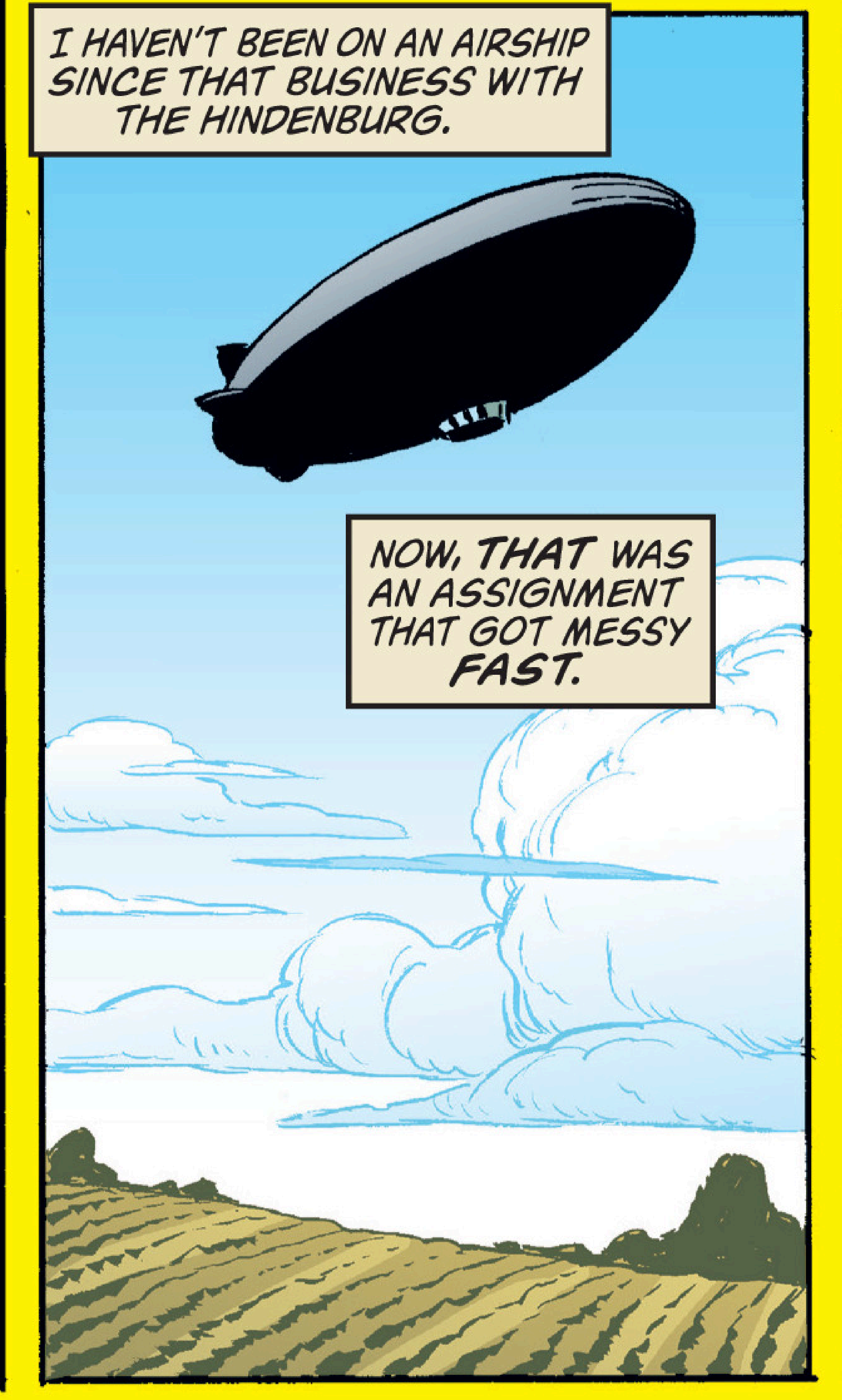
I WAS ABOUT READY TO PACK IT IN AND TAKE SNOW BACK HOME WHEN WE FINALLY GOT A NIBBLE.
HUH?
MISS, YOU FORGOT YOUR PURSE!
THAT CAFÉ BACK THERE? YOU LEFT YOUR PURSE.
IT'S NOT **MY** PURSE.
CERTAINLY IT IS! I SAW YOU WITH MY OWN **EYE**.
DO YOU THINK I COULD MISTAKE A BEAUTY LIKE YOURS FOR ANY OTHER?
HE WAS A CHARMER, BUT I DIDN'T HAVE TIME FOR FLATTERY.
WILL YOU **TELL** THIS GUY THAT...
SNOW?
MRPH!
SNOW!
THE TRAP HAD SPRUNG, ALL RIGHT, BUT NOW THE MOUSE WAS GETTING AWAY WITH THE **CHEESE**.

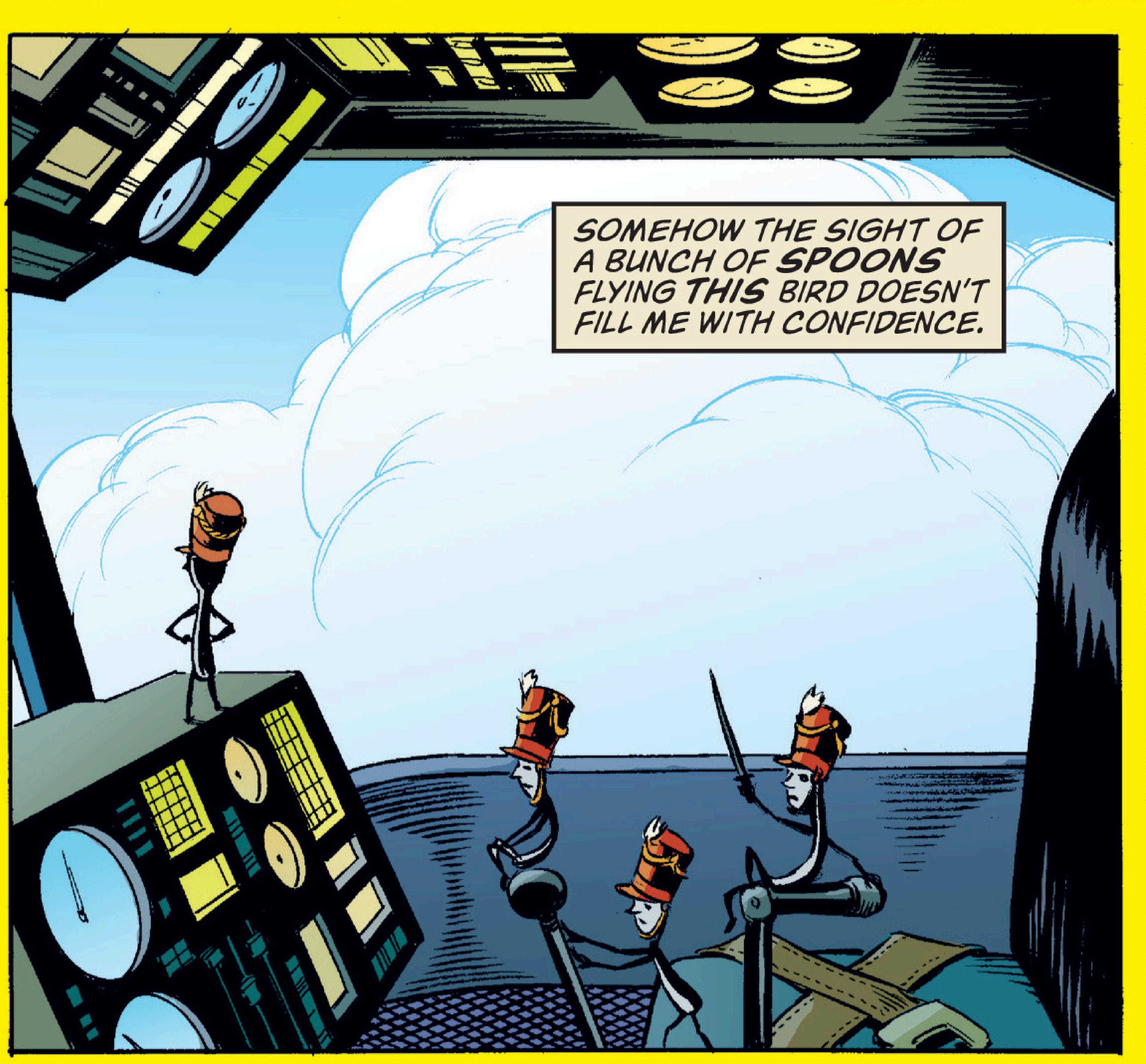
IT WAS ONLY AFTER HE TOOK OFF RUNNING THAT I RECOGNIZED THE CHARMER UNDER ALL THAT FACIAL HAIR: IVAN DURAK.
I HAD **PROMISED** BIGBY THAT I WOULDN'T LET DOROTHY HURT A COAL-BLACK HAIR ON SNOW'S HEAD.
IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO HER, BIGBY WOULD HAVE **MY** HEAD. AND I WOULD **DESERVE** WHATEVER VILE PUNISHMENT HE COULD DEVISE.
SCREEECH!
NOW, I CAN RUN **FAST,** BUT NOT AS FAST AS A **CAR** WITH A **HEAD START.**
I WOULD HAVE JUST **STOLEN** A CAR TO FOLLOW BEHIND, BUT THERE WAS **NOTHING** ON HAND.
I HAD INTENDED TO SNARE DOROTHY, BUT SHE SLIPPED THROUGH MY FINGERS.
AND WITH SNOW KIDNAPPED, THIS ASSIGNMENT HAD SUDDENLY BECOME A **RESCUE** OPERATION.

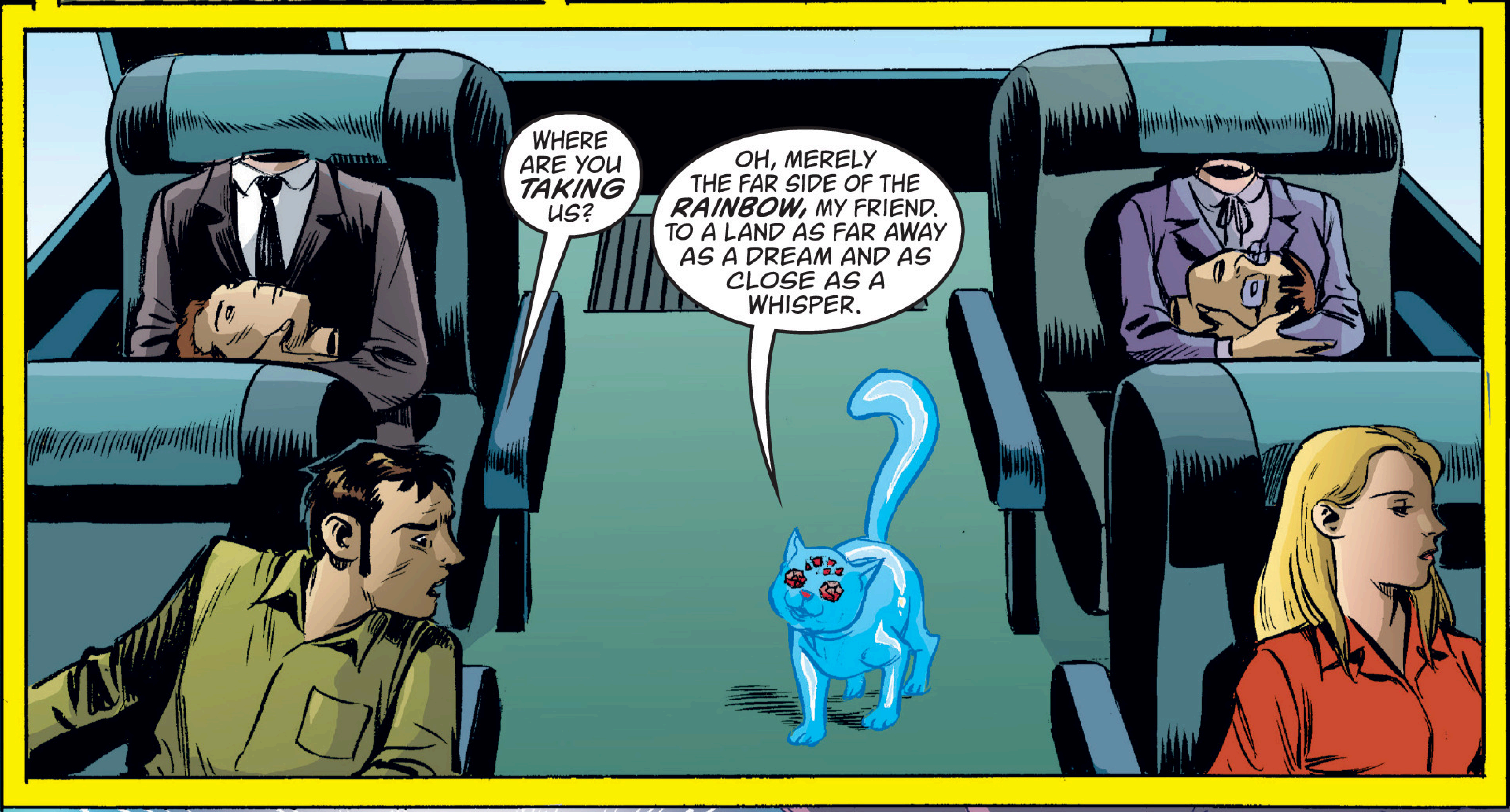
I MANAGED TO SLEEP OVER MOST OF THE ATLANTIC, AND WHEN I WOKE UP, WE WERE BACK IN THE GOOD OLD U.S. OF A.
Kansas, Now.
IT WOULD MAKE SENSE IF DOROTHY ENDED UP COMING BACK HERE. POETIC, EVEN.
OUR TWO "ESCORTS" HAVEN'T SAID A SINGLE WORD THE WHOLE TIME.
WHERE IS DOROTHY GALE? I THOUGHT WE WERE BEING BROUGHT TO HER.
DON'T WASTE YOUR BREATH, IVAN. I'M STARTING TO THINK THESE TWO CAN'T TALK.
IS THAT RIGHT? CAT GET YOUR TONGUE?
HE MAY NOT TALK, BUT HE GETS THE MESSAGE ACROSS CLEAR ENOUGH.
HE WANTS US TO GO THAT WAY.

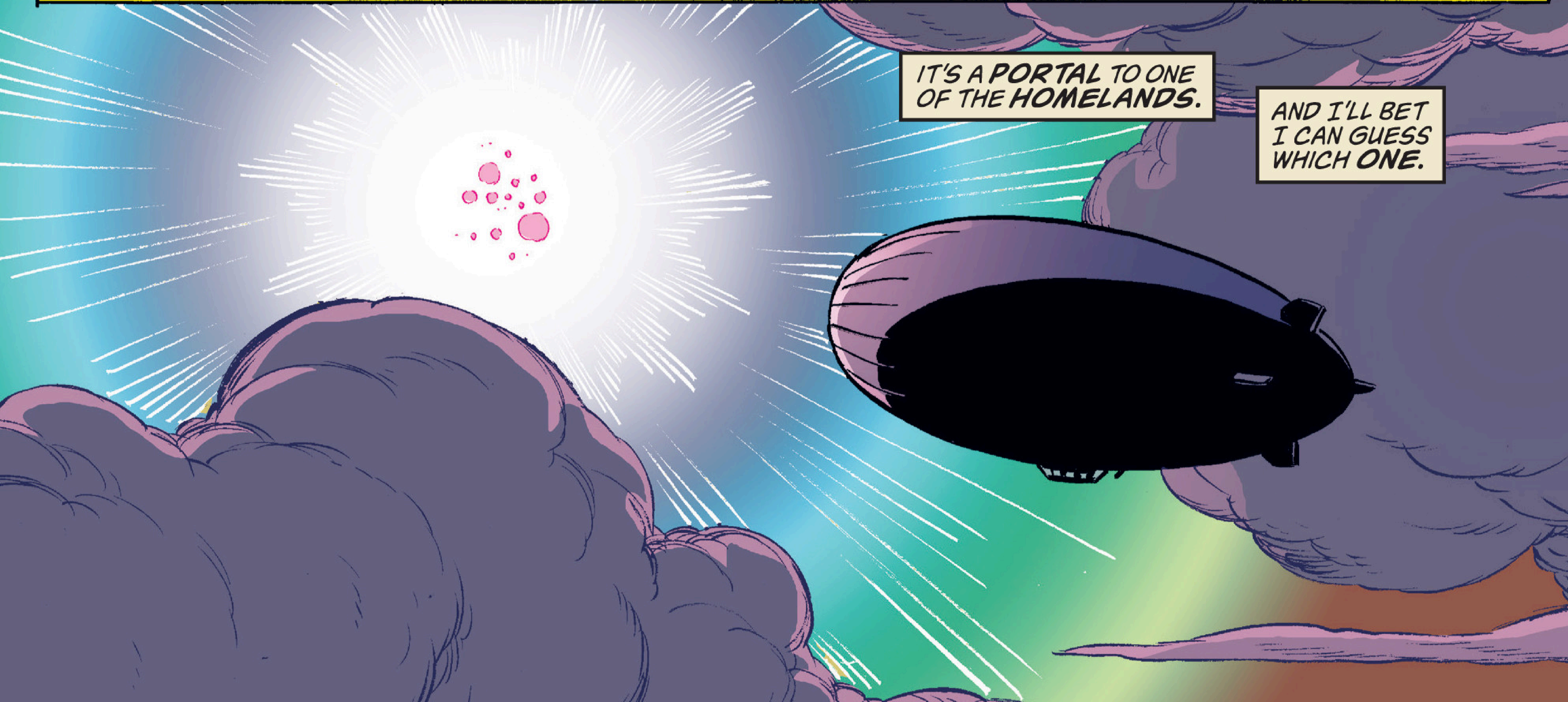
IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE THIS ISN'T OUR **DESTINATION,** JUST ANOTHER **LAYOVER.**
CINDY, WHERE CAN A ***BLIMP*** TAKE US THAT A ***PLANE*** CANNOT?
I THINK WE'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT.
DO YOU THINK DOROTHY IS ONBOARD?
NO WAY. THINGS ARE ***NEVER*** THAT EASY.
OH ***MY.***
WHAT WAS I SAYING ABOUT CATS AND TONGUES?

SO PLEASED YOU COULD **JOIN** US. I'VE BEEN WAITING SIMPLY **AGES** FOR YOU.
DO TAKE YOUR SEATS, AND WE'LL BE OFF.
I'VE HEARD OF YOU. BUNGLE, RIGHT?
ONE OF DOROTHY'S CREEPY LITTLE HELPERS.
CLICK
SOMEHOW I DIDN'T EXPECT TO MEET A GLASS CAT WITH VISIBLE BRAINS WHEN I WOKE UP THIS MORNING.
WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO **DO** WITH US?
DO? I DON'T INTEND TO DO **ANYTHING,** EXCEPT ESCORT YOU TO MY MISTRESS.
NOW PLEASE, TAKE YOUR SEATS BEFORE MY ASSOCIATES ARE FORCED TO DO YOU HARM.
WELL, THIS **IS** A DAY FOR FIRSTS.
NO **WONDER** THEY COULDN'T TALK. THEY WERE JUST CLOCKWORK **SUITS** FOR SENTIENT **SILVERWARE.**


I HAVEN'T BEEN ON AN AIRSHIP SINCE THAT BUSINESS WITH THE HINDENBURG.
NOW, **THAT** WAS AN ASSIGNMENT THAT GOT MESSY **FAST.**


SOMEHOW THE SIGHT OF A BUNCH OF **SPOONS** FLYING **THIS** BIRD DOESN'T FILL ME WITH CONFIDENCE.


WHERE ARE YOU **TAKING** US?
OH, MERELY THE FAR SIDE OF THE **RAINBOW,** MY FRIEND. TO A LAND AS FAR AWAY AS A DREAM AND AS CLOSE AS A WHISPER.


IT'S A **PORTAL** TO ONE OF THE **HOMELANDS.**
AND I'LL BET I CAN GUESS WHICH **ONE.**

YEP, I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED IT.
WHERE *ELSE* WOULD WE FIND DOROTHY GALE?
ONE THING'S FOR SURE, THOUGH.
WE'RE NOT IN *KANSAS* ANYMORE...
To Be Continued!